



# Fairfax County Social Media Content Policy

*(Updated April 2012; Adopted June 2011)*

Every day people discuss, debate and engage Fairfax County Government in many online conversations. We recognize the vital importance of participating in these conversations and are committed to ensuring we participate and listen in meaningful ways.

This policy addresses three areas:

- I. Official county social media sites maintained by county employees
- II. Employee access at work to monitor social media
- III. Employee participation at work or home for personal or business purposes

Any department addendums to this policy must be reviewed by the E-Government Steering Committee before implementation.

## Record of Updates

This policy will evolve Refer to this record of updates section for the latest changes.

- **APRIL 2012:** Key changes below include HootSuite, blogs, retention guidelines, new links to Communications Toolkit features and minor modifications to specific tools.

## I.) Official County Social Media Sites

Official county use of social media is intended to broaden the reach of communication and engagement with the community and stakeholders, while utilizing new platforms that offer methods of communicating beyond traditional sources of information such as the county website.

Official social media tools should be used to:

- Deliver public information, customer service and E-Government to county residents
- Advance countywide goals such as creating a culture of engagement
- Communicate directly to the public especially during emergencies
- Increase government transparency and efficiency

### A.) Existing Sites

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) maintains the countywide social media sites on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Flickr](#), and [SlideShare](#). WordPress.com hosts two blogs: an [emergency blog](#) maintained by OPA and a Park Authority blog; Blogger.com hosts two Library blogs.

Additional county Facebook and Twitter accounts feature departments and topics. Departments are encouraged to contribute content to existing county social media sites in lieu of their own presence. If a communications plan includes social media, first consider using existing county social media accounts with existing fan bases. View a [list of lead social media publishers](#) for contact information.

## **B.) Requesting Sites**

New social media sites on Facebook and Twitter may be requested through [this four-step process](#). If approved, OPA will create pages with proper settings, look and feel to ensure consistency; transfer administrative rights to the agency; and retain an administrative role. Departments may not create their own social media sites.

## **C.) Publishing**

### **1. Publishers**

At least [one public information officer](#) (PIO) will serve as the lead staff person for official county social media sites. Mandatory duties include serving as the lead contact for an account, developing the engagement framework for posting information and responding to comments, adhering to policies, and ensuring the social media site is regularly updated. Department staff may manage day-to-day operations of a social media site, but in close consultation with the site's lead PIO.

Only county staff will serve as publishers; publishers will attend mandatory training sessions. Volunteers, interns, contractors and board/authority/commission members are not eligible to administer official accounts. View a [list of lead social media publishers](#).

### **2. OPA's Role**

The Office of Public Affairs will monitor content on all official social media sites to ensure a consistent countywide message and for adherence to this policy. OPA reserves the right to:

- Request social media sites publish the same message about a topic
- Coordinate and/or publish information to any social media site during an emergency
- Direct agencies to modify social media content based on best practices and industry norms

### **3. Posting Guidelines**

Social media content is fleeting because updates compete for attention in personal social media news streams. Official county social media sites need to be clear, precise and follow industry best practices for posting updates.

Three tenets county social media publishers must follow regarding the types of content to share:

- **Relevant:** Information that helps residents and pertains to their daily lives
- **Timely:** Information about deadlines, upcoming events, news or related to current events
- **Actionable:** Information to register, attend, go or do

### **4. What Not to Post:**

- Information about items in litigation or about claims that could be brought against the county.
- Nonpublic information of any kind; always check with [your PIO](#) if unsure.
- Personnel, sensitive or confidential information of any kind.
- Medical information that violates a person's Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protections.

Legal requirements and county guidelines towards the protection of confidential, sensitive, and internal use information still apply.

#### **D.) Links**

As an extension of the county's communications platform, social media sites should include links that direct users back to the county's website for more information, forms, documents or online services as necessary. Agencies must use a link shortener to meet the requirements of character-limited platforms and to track the number of clicks and shares of a link. Instructions to establish these accounts will be provided during training.

External links to media articles or other relevant content are permitted on official county social media sites to encourage conversation and to share information, but external links on the county's official website, [fairfaxcounty.gov](http://fairfaxcounty.gov), are [governed by a separate policy](#).

#### **E.) Comments**

Comments from the public are welcome on social media sites but comments must be monitored daily during working hours to ensure they meet certain criteria. County-created social media forums must be structured narrowly to focus discussions on a particular interest of Fairfax County rather than creating a "public forum." County publishers may only remove postings based on the guidelines below, not because a comment disagrees with county policy. All sections of social media sites that allow comments must include either a link to the following [comments policy published on the public website](#) or the complete text published on the social media site:

The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in Fairfax County, including its many residents, businesses and visitors. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments, and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum.

Once posted, the county reserves the right to delete these kinds of submissions:

1. Vulgar language
2. Personal attacks of any kind
3. Comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability or sexual orientation
4. Spam or links to other sites
5. Clearly off topic
6. Advocate illegal activity
7. Promote particular services, products, or political organizations
8. Infringe on copyrights or trademarks
9. Personally identifiable medical information
10. Information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the Fairfax County Government or its officers and employees. If you have any questions concerning this social media platform, please contact the [Agency Name] at [agency e-mail]@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Comments that do not meet these criteria should be retained then deleted. Publishers should take screenshots of the original county post and the comment that will be deleted. A description detailing why content was removed or deemed not suitable should be maintained.

Publishers may choose to reply to comments and engage residents in the same way we reply to phone and email inquiries, but business decorum must prevail and factual responses -- not opinions -- must be shared. Agency staff monitoring for and replying to comments must coordinate responses with other agencies, if appropriate, so the best response can be provided.

### **F.) Emergencies**

During emergencies, all social media content and postings must be coordinated with the Office of Public Affairs as part of its Emergency Support Function 15 protocols. Depending on the incident, publishers may be directed to point to specific social media sites that will serve as the main source(s) of information. OPA reserves the right to publish content directly to any official county social media site during an emergency. OPA will notify publishers in advance when possible, but if time is of the essence, OPA has access to all accounts and information may be published. If department staff is unavailable to maintain its social media content during an emergency and OPA deems it absolutely critical to update a certain account, then information will be published.

OPA also reserves the right to establish new social media sites during emergencies as needed that will support an incident.

### **G.) Photo/Video Release Form**

Please refer to the [photo/video release form](#) in the Communications Toolkit.

### **H.) Embedding Icons and Content**

Social media icons and content players such as YouTube videos or Flickr galleries may be embedded on county web pages (see Sections K, L and M about accessibility for each tool). Social media content from select partners such as the state or federal government may be embedded. OPA reserves the right to use agency social media content on countywide web pages, social media sites and other platforms.

### **I.) Facebook**

View a full directory of [official county Facebook pages](#). Publishers will be required to attend a mandatory pre-launch workshop that covers many Facebook page features, including:

#### **1. Understanding Publisher and Personal Roles**

OPA will grant administrative rights to page publishers. All publishers must use their own personal Facebook profiles to access official county sites (the public will not know publisher identities). It is a violation of Facebook's terms of service to create additional personal profiles or to create a generic personal profile to administer a business page.

#### **2. Coordinating County Pages**

OPA will add new official county Facebook pages to the Favorites sections of all official county accounts. If one county page receives a question about another county business area that has a

Facebook page, then the other agency must be notified and answer the question on Facebook. For example, if a Connector bus question appears on the Police page, then Police should ask the Connector lead publisher to provide an answer directly on the Police page; if a department is not using social media, then answers may be provided by the original page or the Fairfax County Government account, but the answers must be coordinated with the department in question.

### **3. Commenting as a Page**

Commenting on other Fairfax County, local, state or federal government Facebook pages is permitted, but you must speak only about your business area and refrain from misrepresenting county positions. Contribute factual comments on business, nonprofit, media, partner and other Facebook pages as appropriate. Commenting as an official county Facebook page is similar to serving as an official spokesperson for the county. Publishers must comment as the official county page, not as themselves personally. Facebook does not allow business pages to comment on personal pages.

### **4. Wall Settings**

When OPA creates a new page, all site features that allow the public to post their own topics, pictures or videos will be disabled. County Facebook pages are not “open forums” or a place for people to share comments about any topic they choose. Temporary exceptions for turning on the wall may be used and granted by OPA in cases of emergencies where situational awareness of an unfolding event would be helpful.

### **5. Comments**

Please see section E for details about deleting comments on county social media sites. Additionally, if a Facebook publisher plans to delete a comment, a screenshot of the topic and the offending comment must be saved for documentation purposes. Facebook also provides the ability for any page fan to mark any comment as spam. Page publishers must monitor pages not only for spam comments, but also for comments that should not be marked as spam if they do not violate the comments policy. If you need assistance, contact OPA.

### **6. Updating from Mobile Devices**

If publishers use personal devices such as an iPhone or Droid with Facebook apps, official county social media sites can be managed from these devices. However, be aware the app does not provide the full set of page management features found on Facebook’s desktop browser version. If a publisher loses a personal phone and someone accesses the Facebook app, then an official county resource is at risk. If you are publisher and use a smartphone, then you must protect county information by using a passcode on your personal device. If a publisher loses a phone, OPA and DIT Information Security must be notified immediately and administrative rights will be temporarily removed.

### **7. External Links**

Links to media articles are permitted to generate conversation, but vary the sources and limit the number of times external links are shared.

## **J.) Twitter**

View a full directory of [official county Twitter accounts](#). Publishers will be required to attend a mandatory pre-launch workshop that covers many features of Twitter accounts, including:

### **1. Design of Twitter.com Pages**

All county Twitter accounts will use the same background design provided by OPA; agencies may choose their own profile icon.

## **2. HootSuite**

Publishers will use HootSuite to manage official Twitter accounts. Each approved Twitter publisher must create their own account on HootSuite. OPA will connect HootSuite profiles with county Twitter accounts. For security purposes, passwords for Twitter.com will not be provided to publishers. Agencies that use both Facebook and Twitter will be able to manage both accounts through HootSuite.

## **3. Retweeting**

Limit retweeting to information from appropriate, credible sources such as government agencies, authorities/boards/commissions, and industry leaders.

## **4. Replying**

Reply to anyone as needed. Ask other county Twitter accounts to provide answers as needed; otherwise coordinate responses with agencies not on Twitter. Replying through an official account is equivalent to serving as an official online spokesperson for the county.

## **5. Following**

Follow select Twitter accounts such as all Fairfax County government agencies, other government entities, media, key partners/nonprofits and industry-specific groups. Do not follow all followers.

## **6. Comments**

Unlike Facebook and its threaded conversations, Twitter accounts can only delete their own comments, not anyone else's tweets. The disclaimer listed in section E of this policy does not apply to Twitter.

# **K.) YouTube**

## **1. Channels**

OPA maintains the county's primary [YouTube channel](#). Select departments such as Police and Library also have dedicated YouTube channels. Any other agency needing a YouTube video must work with OPA to publish clips to the county's channel by contacting [webcontent@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:webcontent@fairfaxcounty.gov).

## **2. Existing Channel 16 Video**

Existing Channel 16 videos may be converted for YouTube; contact Channel 16 staff and ask for the video to be converted to a YouTube format. OPA will upload the video and contact the agency if more details are needed.

## **3. Planning Video**

When planning video programming, county communicators should contact Channel 16 staff to review options.

## **4. Disclaimer**

All YouTube channels must contain the following disclaimer on the home page and in the description of each video:

Please note: Fairfax County is not responsible for the content provided on "related" and "promoted" videos that are accessible from this county's YouTube channel. All viewers should note that these related videos and comments expressed on them do not reflect the opinions



and position of the Fairfax County government or its officers and employees.

#### **5. Comments**

Please see section E for more details. OPA receives notification of pending comments on YouTube and will approve responses that do not violate the criteria outlined in section E.

#### **6. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, work with Channel 16 for captions. Agencies also may publish a text-only script on a web page and provide the link to OPA to include in the video's description.

#### **7. Embedding Video Players**

YouTube video players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

### **L.) Flickr**

#### **1. Channels**

OPA maintains the county's primary [Flickr channel](#). The Library also has a dedicated Flickr account. Other departments who want to share photos on Flickr will work with OPA by contacting [webcontent@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:webcontent@fairfaxcounty.gov).

#### **2. Choosing Photos**

Select photos that best represent all aspects of the event or subject without being repetitive. Ten images are generally more effective than 40.

#### **3. Metadata**

When submitting a request to upload photos, the following information is required:

- Title (caption) for each picture
- Tags for each set and photo; these help people search for images on Flickr or search engines such as Google
- Description for the full photo set, as well as any specific descriptions for individual photos

#### **4. Comments**

Please see section E for more details. OPA receives notification of comments on Flickr, monitors for activity and will coordinate responses or deletions.

#### **5. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, photos must include captions that describe the content.

#### **6. Embedding Photo Players**

Flickr photo players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

#### **7. More Guidelines**

[View more photo guidelines](#) in the Communications Toolkit.

### **M.) SlideShare**

#### **1. Channel**

OPA maintains the county's only [SlideShare channel](#). SlideShare hosts PowerPoint slides and it also can be used to create audio casts with voiceovers on slides. Contact

webcontent@fairfaxcounty.gov for more information.

## **2. Comments**

Please see section E for more details. OPA receives notification of comments on SlideShare, monitors for activity and will coordinate responses or deletions.

## **3. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, agencies must provide OPA with the original PowerPoint file (not PDFs) so the text can be published onto a text-only section of SlideShare.

## **4. Embedding SlideShare Players**

SlideShare players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

## **N.) Promotion**

Promoting official social media sites is one key to success. Include social media website addresses, widgets, icons or mentions on printed publications, county webpages, signs and other places of high visibility. Staff may choose to promote the mobile phone versions of sites, too:

Facebook: m.facebook.com/(account name here)

Twitter: m.twitter.com/(account name here).

## **O.) Ideas for Other Platforms**

The E-Government Steering Committee will continuously evaluate social media technologies to promote established county goals and policies. Agencies are required to work with the committee if there is interest in pursuing new tools or new ways to use existing tools.

## **P.) Archives and Retention**

Communications received through social media are public records that generally should be considered as “correspondence” for the purposes of Virginia retention laws (GS 19 Series 010039). Generally, such social media responses need to be retained as long as administratively necessary before it can be destroyed.

However, there are exceptions to this rule. If an agency specifically solicits public comments or communication relating to a project that is covered by another records retention schedule, then those communications should be retained with that other records series. For example, GS4 Series 010004 directs that Citizen Complaint records be retained for one year after last action. Any “complaints” should be kept for that one year period. Retention may be accomplished by keeping them online, moving them to an offline repository or printing and filing hardcopies at the discretion of the office.

If an agency is using social media to explicitly collect feedback, that agency must take steps to ascertain the appropriate retention period and retain such records for at least that period of time.

Content submitted on Fairfax County Government social media sites for posting that is deemed unsuitable because it is not related to the current subject matter or is considered inappropriate content should be retained (for example, by using screenshots). A description detailing why content was removed or deemed not suitable should be also maintained.



### **Q.) Security**

Credentials for official county social media sites should be managed according to the county password policy. Passwords should maintain complexity requirements and use uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters. Passwords to social media sites should be changed at a minimum of every 90 days. In the event of a compromise, or suspected compromise, passwords should be changed immediately. A Fairfax County official email address should be used to establish an official social media site when possible.

Credentials to county social media sites should be protected and limited to authorized personnel.

Refer to the county's [Information Security policy](#) for more information.

### **R.) Related Policies**

Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and county laws, regulations and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding use of county electronic resources, copyright, records retention, Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA), Virginia Government Data and Dissemination Practices Act, First Amendment, federal and state privacy laws, and Fairfax County human resource regulations and information security policies.

### **S.) Violation of Policy**

Violation of these standards may result in the removal of agency social media sites or disciplinary actions against specific publishers. The Deputy County Executive who oversees information resources and technology retains the authority to remove pages.

## II.) Employee Access at Work

While the county understands social media is an important way people communicate and share information about policies and programs, access to sites cannot be provided to all employees at this time. However, access for monitoring social media sites can be [granted to select staff for specific business purposes](#).

Employees with access to monitor content from work must follow the guidelines detailed in the next section.

## III.) Employee Participation

This section of the policy serves as a road map for employees to navigate social media sites with regards to county information. Fairfax County respects the legal rights of employees to express themselves on their own time and equipment. In general, what you do on your own time is your own business, but your responsibilities as a county employee do not always end when you are off the clock.

### **A.) Personal Responsibility and Ethics**

Employees are personally responsible for the content they publish on blogs, social media networks or any other form of user-generated content in conformance with [personnel regulations, Chapter 16](#). Ethics apply, including online. Fairfax County employees are bound by [Code of Ethics](#) and the [Principle Guidance for the Code of Ethics](#).

### **B.) Official County Social Media Sites**

Fairfax County uses official social media sites to communicate information as outlined in Section I of this policy. Only those employees with administrative access and training may express official county positions or speak as the county through a government social media account. Official positions shall not be conveyed through personal accounts. Additionally, only county spokespeople may share official comments on other forms of social media such as blogs or discussion forums.

### **C.) Speak For Yourself**

If you identify yourself as a county employee on social media platforms, then you must indicate your views are not the official view of Fairfax County Government. If you publish content on any website that relates to your work or subjects associated with the county, then use a disclaimer such as, "The views expressed on this site (or in this post) are my own and do not necessarily represent Fairfax County's positions, strategies or opinions."

#### **What Not to Post:**

- Information about items in litigation or about claims that could be brought against the county.
- Nonpublic information of any kind; always check with [your PIO](#) if unsure.
- Personnel, sensitive or confidential information of any kind.
- Medical information that violates a person's HIPAA protections.

These items must not be posted on personal or public social media sites; employees will be held

responsible for any violations. The decision about what you publish is yours and so is the responsibility.

Employees utilizing social media for personal use shall not use the Fairfax County Government seal or other official county marks nor use the county government's name to promote or endorse any product, cause, or political candidate.

#### **D.) Monitoring Social Media at Work**

If you have been granted access to monitor social media sites at work, then you must remain focused on the topic(s) you requested access to monitor. DIT monitors the usage of employees with social media access. You must participate in personal social media conversations on your own time and your own equipment per [DIT policy](#) and [HR personnel regulation 50](#).

#### **E.) Social Networking Implications**

Social media sites that allow you to interact with others require careful consideration about the implications of "friending," "liking," "following" or accepting/sending requests. There is the potential for misinterpretation of the relationship or the potential of sharing protected information. Relationships such as supervisor-subordinate and client-patient merit close consideration where a wealth of information can be discovered if access is granted. Agencies may provide additional guidance on client-patient relationships and other associations; this additional guidance must be reviewed by the E-Government Steering Committee.

#### **F.) Violation of Policy**

Employees who do not comply with these policies are subject to disciplinary action consistent with personnel regulations. Agencies can treat acts or omissions occurring in the context of social media in the same manner as any other employee act or omission. Failure to abide by policies established for use of social media may result in the loss of any social networking privileges an employee may have. Incidents related to the use of social media technology should be reported to OPA, agency Public Information Officer, HR representative, HIPPA coordinator or other appropriate staff. The PIO or OPA should request investigations into social media policy violations, misuse, suspected compromises of official county social media sites with the Department of Information Technology Information Security Office, HR or other related departments.

#### **G.) Additional Guidance and Tips**

The following social media tips are provided as a resource to help employees navigate personal use of social media.

1. On your own time and equipment, you may choose to share county information. Repost and share county news, events and other information through your personal social networks to family and friends. You may choose to become a fan of the various county [Facebook pages](#) or [Twitter accounts](#). You also may visit the [Fairfax County NewsWire](#) for a comprehensive list of daily news headlines and social media sites. Linking directly to the county's website is the most effective way to share complete information.
2. Even if you are not an official online spokesperson/publisher, you can help monitor social media on your own time and equipment if you choose. If you see potential issues or errors

about Fairfax County on a social media site, then pass them on to your supervisor, agency PIO and/or OPA.

3. If you have suggestions for improvements about Fairfax County Government, including your department, please state them constructively or go through proper internal channels to share your concerns and suggestions. If you witness illegal, fraudulent or unethical conduct by county employees, contact the appropriate authorities such as department supervisors, the Police Department or the Internal Auditor's Office.
4. Personally identifiable information is at risk if shared on social media technology. Information that is intended for friends, family, and colleagues may become available to individuals with malicious intent.
5. Social media and internet usage should not be considered anonymous.
6. Be aware that what you post online (comments, images, videos) is in a domain no longer controlled by you, and that your shared experiences, thoughts, and comments are no longer solely accessed by you. There is no such thing as a "private" social media site. For example, while your personal Facebook privacy settings may be adjusted so only friends can view content, those same friends can forward your comments to anyone or take screenshots of your posts.
7. Monitor your friends, family, and colleagues comments on personal social media sites. Be aware that their comments and content are linked and associated with your social media accounts.
8. Keep your home computer up to date with current patches and software to minimize vulnerabilities. Social media is an evolving focal point for cybercrime.
9. Use strong passwords and different passwords for each online account. Change these passwords frequently or at any suspected compromise, or strange occurrences that could indicate a compromise.
10. Consider use of advanced privacy settings that social media technology offers inherently through membership. However, realize that your published social media content may be probed, transmitted, stored, and archived by external entities.
11. Review the privacy and acceptable use agreements for all social media sites that you use.
12. Use caution when you click links that you receive in messages from your friends on your social website. Treat links in messages on these sites as you would links in email messages. Just clicking a link can compromise your browser, computer, and your identity.

#### **IV.) More Information**

If you have questions about this policy or would like a presentation to staff about why Fairfax County uses social media, then contact the Office of Public Affairs. You also may visit the [FairfaxNET resource page about social media](#). Contact the Information Security Office with concerns about security.